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STATINT



Britain's Woes

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Responsible Englishmen, masters at criticizing their own institutions—and who fiercely resent criticism from foreigners—are getting weary with the sex aspects of the sex-and-security crisis. Daily servings of sex stories have the same effect as daily servings of pink champagne—the stomach rebels.

Security is what interests them now. What they really want to find out is whether the accepted tradition of masterful British supersleuthing, fictionalized and enshrined in a succession of folk-heroes from hawk-eyed Sherlock Holmes to steely-eyed James Bond, 007, is itself a fiction. Editors and politicians who have been crying, "What's going on in this country?" now want to know if the supposed geniuses of M15 know, themselves, what's going on in this country.

Reluctant admission by Macmillan's government that the man who tipped off the escaped British diplomat-traitors, Burgess and Maclean, was indeed another British diplomat, Harold Philby—although Macmillan himself once denied it—has been the last straw. Whether it will break the back of the Conservative regime is uncertain. What is certain is an overwhelming demand for a renovation of the personalities, procedures and—this seems fundamental—the attitudes and values prevailing in British security services. Embattled authorities were pleased to have the television testimony of Allen Dulles, who said Western security was efficient, but this will satisfy almost nobody here.

The purpose of counter-intelligence is not just to catch spies, but to prevent their spying. Macmillan claimed the identification of Philby to be a security success, not a failure, to which the furious Opposition retorts that the man, like Burgess and Maclean, not only got away with his spying but got away himself.

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If there is a gross slackness in British security, that concerns every government allied with Britain. Remedies shall be applied, and how, concern Britain alone. Her political procedures and traditions are very different from ours, and what is appropriate in the context of Washington may not be appropriate or workable in the context of London. Whatever is done, we may be quite sure that nothing resembling a "witch hunt" is going to develop in Britain; guilt by simple accusation, which is essentially what happened to many Americans in the McCarthy period, is not likely to get out of hand. Nor would a British policeman, even one as highly regarded as the counterpart of J. Edgar Hoover, be permitted to use his agency's press agent, admitting never a failure, to indulge in homilies and lectures on the political philosophy of those to the left of center.

All this Britain will certainly have. But the painful problem of reconciling the interests of the state with the rights of the individual will not go away. Certainly British authorities in their security procedures are going to have to move, however cautiously, in the direction of less benefit of the doubt to the suspected individual. It will be difficult, almost as difficult as altering the physical reflexes of so homogeneous and deeply patriotic a people, to have them crediting the existence of such a thing as a hard-core traitor. People so passionately jealous of their own national dignity find it excruciatingly painful to think of any one among them.

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In the realm of security, many Englishmen now feel they have been tolerant to a fault.

Item—When Foreign Secretary Harold Macmillan, eight years ago, accepted without question the assurances that Philby was all right, he said to the House of Commons: "We must care that in protecting our way of life we do not destroy it."

Item—When Miss Mandy Rice-Davies, the second wife of a man in the Profumo affair, had testified, the first angry question in the House were demands to know by what right the government had prevented her from leaving the country.

Item—The private incomes of traitors Burgess and Maclean are still regularly forwarded to them from Britain.

But the moral and intellectual climate in which British security people must work is not exclusively composed of modern and ancient traditions. Two other, latter-day influences have played a part. One was made in America—McCarthyism—the profound revulsion it created in British minds. The other has been the intensive, if not extensive, effect of intellectual Marxism, beginning in the universities and extending into areas of the civil service. A bonafide Communist would be hard to find today in the British government. Others, from habitual fellow-traveler, to the kind of person who "equates" American policies with Russian policies, to the simple-minded "American" policies with the Russians" fellow, are not so rare as they are in some areas of press and broadcasting. Whatever history in the remote future may prove about their attitudes, present history merely proves that the Russians try to use them and sometimes succeed.

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